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Keillor donates Appleton performance fee to Fox Valley Symphony

By Terri Dougherty
Post-Crescent staff writer

APPLETON — Garrison Keillor made a surprise announcement after his sold-out appearance Tuesday night in Appleton, and the Fox Valley Symphony couldn't be happier. Keillor donated his performance fee of \$35,100 to the orchestra.

"It came out of the blue," said Marta Weldon, the symphony's executive director. "I was a little dumbstruck, I have to say. It's such a magnanimous gift."

Keillor is the host of "A Prairie Home Companion" public radio show and author of books about fictional Lake Wobegon. He performed "A Night with Garrison Keillor" with the Fox Valley Symphony.

Tuesday afternoon, Keillor said he's happy to support orchestras in smaller communities. "They are much more living on the edge than the Minnesota Orchestra or symphonies in Milwaukee or Chicago," he told *The PC*.

He delivered the news of his donation to Weldon in a low-key style Tuesday afternoon, while walking to the stage for a rehearsal.

"We were chit-chatting about this and that, giving him information about the orchestra, and (he said,) 'By the way, I want to let you know I'm performing as a benefit to your orchestra,'" Weldon said. "It led to a lot of silence."

Weldon said it was given to inspire others to support community orchestras. "He's doing this because he realizes orchestras need help," she said.

Keillor has performed with symphonies such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic and New York Philharmonic, but has no qualms about appearing with orchestras in smaller communities. He says Midwestern audiences are no different.

"I think the country has gotten all mixed around," he said. "I don't differentiate by region."

"It matters more what night of the week it is."

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